



Senator Birdwell's 'Capitol Update' **5-20-15**

Greetings from your Texas Capitol! It has been about three weeks since our last Capitol Update, and things have indeed been busy during that time. This edition of the newsletter is focused almost solely on legislation. I'll touch on two of my key legislative initiatives, and a handful of other items I was proud to help pass through the Senate.

Border Security Bill Package Moves Forward

In coordination with my colleague, Representative Dennis Bonnen (R-Angleton), I am pleased to be moving forward HB 11, our joint legislation addressing the overdue security needs of the Texas-Mexico border. As Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Border Security and the sponsor of HB 11, I moved this bill out of subcommittee yesterday and intend to pass the bill through the Veterans Affairs & Military Installations Committee late this afternoon (Wednesday). When the bill reaches the Senate floor late this week or early next week, the House and Senate will have finalized the last details on our joint border security package—then it's on to Governor Abbott's desk. I am extremely proud to have been part of this process, and grateful for the opportunity to take the lead on border security issues for the Senate. When we get this vitally important legislation passed, I will be sure to include its provisions in the Capitol Update.

Update on SB 1735 (Hazlewood Protection Act)

In a recent Capitol Update, I shared with you some details of my legislation updating the veteran higher education tuition exemption law known as the Hazlewood Act. Since that time, SB 1735 passed the Senate by a bipartisan supermajority and moved on to the House. The op-ed and press release linked below lay out the issue in great detail—the background on Hazlewood, our current circumstances, and the long-term protection we are putting in place for our veterans. I hope you find these documents helpful and insightful on this very important issue.

- ['Hazlewood reform bill would ensure college tuition breaks for veterans, families for years to come'](#)
- [RELEASE: Texas Seante Passes Legislation Updating, Sustaining Key Veteran Benefit](#)



It was an honor for me to be with Mrs. Katie McLean—widow of Sgt. Lance McLean of Hood County who was killed in the line of duty when responding to a call—and Hood County Sheriff Roger Deeds, at a reception following the Fallen Peace Officers Memorial Ceremony at the State Capitol.



Dr. Lesca Hadley of Cleburne (center) served as the Doctor of the Day for the Texas Senate on April 30, and brought along two of her students—Blair Cushing (left) and Shiv Aggarwal. Each day during the legislative session, the Texas House and Senate each host a physician who works in the Capitol for the day.

Key Bill Movements

This session, the Texas Senate has moved forward a wealth of conservative legislation as desired by the citizens of our state. In the last few weeks we've passed a number of good bills, a few of which I want to briefly highlight here:

- HB 4 (Campbell) – Identified in as an emergency item by Governor Greg Abbott in his State of the State address, the issue of pre-kindergarten education has been a major topic this session. I supported HB 4 for

one key reason: Our state currently spends \$1.5 billion in taxpayer dollars (per biennium) on existing half-day Pre-K; without expanding these programs, this legislation finally inserts strong accountability standards and metrics to track their success, and thus, the success of our young Texans.

- HB 1378 (Bettencourt) – Requires political subdivisions to report debt obligations to the Comptroller, who will make it available online for the public. This gives voters the opportunity to easily access vital financial information, something taxpayers should have the right to do if they wish. CSHB 1378 gives taxpayers who pay these debts full transparency of their liabilities so they are better informed and able to make well informed decisions when they go to vote for or against any new debt being proposed.
- SB 374 (Schwertner) – This important legislation requires state agencies to verify the work status of all new employees using the federal ‘E-verify’ program. Texas state agencies (including public universities) employ more than 300,000 individuals, and it is essential to ensure that taxpayer dollars are only used to employ those who are legally eligible to work in the United States.
- SB 1968 (Huffman) – Prohibits labor union dues from being automatically withdrawn from the payroll of state government employees and then automatically deposited to union accounts. SB 1968 makes no changes to a public employee’s involvement with a union, nor does it prohibit them from using a portion of their salaries to pay union dues. Instead, this simply ensures that the state is not in the business of collecting money on behalf of a labor union.

Legislative Highlight: SB 1760

Authored by Senator Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe), SB 1760 takes a number of important steps to make the application of ad valorem taxation to homeowners more transparent and equitable. While a very important bill in its own right, I was particularly supportive of SB 1760 thanks to a floor amendment offered by Senator Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston), which requires that 60% of a city council or commissioners court must approve a tax rate if it exceeds the previous year’s rate. Under current law, only the support of a simple majority of a governing body of a taxing unit is required to adopt a tax rate that exceeds the effective tax rate. Long advocated by fiscal conservatives, this super majority of 60% (3/5ths) would apply to tax rates set by cities, school districts, counties and special districts if they set a property tax rate above the effective property tax rate. The effective tax rate is set at 3% above last year’s rate, so the new requirement—if adopted by the Texas House—means all property tax increases must earn the support of at least 3/5ths of your local elected officials.

That wraps up this edition of the Capitol Update, folks. I welcome you to share this newsletter with your friends, family and colleagues in Senate District 22. Additionally, they can subscribe to the Update here: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/Senate/members/dist22/Signup.htm>.

As always, I hope you will take advantage of the opportunity to keep up with the happenings at your Texas Capitol. Please visit my official website at www.senate.state.tx.us, follow us on [Facebook](#)/[Twitter](#), and for all other needs, please visit the Texas Legislature Online at www.capitol.state.tx.us.

Sincerely,



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